

*In the Claims:*

Page 13, line 1:

I claim:

1. (Currently amended) A device for handling an article (13)-such as a coil spring, the device ~~being characterized in that it comprises~~comprising a body (10)-having an internal housing (12)-suitable for containing said article-(13), said housing (12)-presenting at least one open end (10A, 10B)-and a constriction zone (14)-that is suitable, in a stable state in which said constriction zone (14)-presents a reduced dimension (~~D14X~~)-that is reduced in a first direction (X), for retaining said article (13)-inside the body-(10), and for being deformed to adopt a deformed configuration enabling said article (13)-to be inserted into the housing (12)-~~or enabling said article (13)-and~~ to be extracted from the housing-(12).

2. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~preceding claim 1~~, ~~characterized in that the constriction zone (14) in its~~wherein in the deformed configuration thereof, the constriction zone is in a state that is unstable.

3. (Currently amended) A device according to claim 1-~~or claim 2~~, ~~characterized in that~~wherein said body-(10) is substantially elongate and tubular in shape.

4. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~to any preceding claim 1~~, ~~characterized in that~~wherein said constriction zone (14)-in ~~its~~the stable state thereof presents a reduced dimension (~~D14X~~)-in a cross-section (S14)of said body-(10).

5. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~any preceding~~claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~wherein said constriction zone (14)-in ~~its~~the deformed configuration thereof presents a cross-section (S14)that is substantially circular.

6. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~any preceeding~~claim 5, characterized ~~in that wherein~~ the constriction zone (14) ~~in its~~the stable state ~~thereof~~ presents two closer-together portions (14A, 14B) along a short dimension (D14X) and two farther-apart portions (14C, 14D) along a long dimension (D14Y), said two farther-apart portions (14C, 14D) being suitable for being moved towards each other in order to move said two closer-together portions (14A, 14B) apart from each other.

7. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~any preceeding~~claim 6, characterized ~~in that wherein~~ said body (10) has two open ends (10A, 10B).

8. (Currently amended) A device according to ~~any preceeding~~claim 7, characterized ~~in that wherein~~ said body (10) includes a collar (16) close to at least one open end (10A, 10B) of said body.

9. (Currently amended) An installation for handling an article such as a helical spring, the installation ~~being characterized in that it comprises~~comprising at least one holder means (22A, 22B, 22B'; 23A)suitable and arranged for holding a device (11) according to ~~any preceeding~~claim 1, and at least one force-application means (24) member suitable and arranged for acting on said device (11) to deform said constriction zone (14).

10. (Currently amended) An installation according to claim 9, ~~characterized in that it further comprises~~comprising a first feeder means (18) for feeding a plurality of devices (11) and a second feeder means (20) for feeding a plurality of articles (13).

11. (Currently amended) An installation according to claim 9 ~~or claim 10~~, ~~characterized in that wherein~~ said first feeder means (18) comprises a chute (118) suitable for co-operating with said article (13).

12. (Currently amended) An installation according to ~~any one of claims~~claim 9, or ~~11, characterized in that it includes~~including at least one article loader means ~~(26)~~suitable and arranged for inserting anthe article ~~(13)~~into athe device.

13. (Currently Amended) An installation according to ~~any one of claims~~claim 9 to 12, ~~e~~characterized ~~in that it includes~~including at least one article unloader means ~~(28)~~suitable and arranged for enabling an article ~~(13)~~to be extracted from the device (11) in which said article (13) is housed.

14. (Currently Amended) A method of handling an article ~~(13)~~such as a helical spring, the method being characterized that that in which the following steps are performed:

- providing a handling device ~~(11)~~having a body (10) with an internal housing (12) suitable for containing said article ~~(13)~~, said housing ~~(12)~~presenting at least one open end (10A, 10B) and a constriction zone (14) suitable, in a stable state in which said constriction zone (14) presents a reduced dimension (D14X) that is reduced in a first direction (X), for retaining said article (13) inside the body (10), and for being deformed to adopt a deformed configuration enabling said article (13) to be introduced into the housing (12) or enabling said article (13) to be extracted from the housing (12);
- deforming the constriction zone ~~(14)~~so that it adopts its deformed configuration;
- inserting the article ~~(13)~~into the body (10) while the constriction zone (14) is in the deformed configuration thereof; and
- causing the constriction zone ~~(14)~~to return to itsthe stable state thereof in which the article ~~(13)~~is held inside the body (10).

15. (Currently amended) A method according to ~~the preceding~~claim 14, ~~e~~characterized ~~in that~~wherein, in order to extract the article ~~(13)~~from the device (11), the constriction zone ~~(14)~~is deformed so that said zone adopts the deformed configuration thereof.

Inventor: Stéphane Chevallier

Title: Object-Handling Device, Object-Handling Installation and Object-Handling Method

Date Filed: May 1, 2006

International Application No. PCT/FR2004/002598

16. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 14 ~~or claim 15~~, characterized ~~in that~~wherein the constriction zone (14) ~~in its~~the deformed configuration thereof is in a state that is unstable.